

**CONSUMERS ASSESS THE NURSING HOME INITIATIVE**  
**TESTIMONY OF RAYMOND E. SUAREZ**  
**BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING**  
**September 23, 1999**

My father, Raymond Suarez, was a resident of the Genesis Elder Care nursing home in Salisbury, Maryland, from July 6, 1998 until his death on July 31, 1999. Salisbury Center, Genesis Elder Care was chosen because it has a dedicated and secure Alzheimer's unit. Due to irregular and what I perceived as sometimes neglectful care, I was forced to pay a caregiver to drive 60 miles round-trip five or six days a week to ensure that my father received at least one full meal per day and that he would be checked for sores, wet bedding, and proper hygiene. I made perhaps 75 to 100 long distance calls to make sure that proper care was given, following up concerns that ranged from delayed medication orders, incorrect food preparation, and broken wheelchairs. It seemed to me that staff shortages and turnover resulted in insufficient attention and care for my father. Frequently, the caregiver, my mother or I became the ones who discovered the fevers, the wet beds, the clothing caked with food, the sores, and generally the ones who had to demand that a nurse practitioner or a staff doctor see my father.

In late June of this year, my father was hospitalized, suffering from a urinary tract infection and dehydration. I was extremely upset about the dehydration and asked a nurse practitioner at the nursing home how that could have happened. She very bravely said that it should not have.

The following week I phoned the ombudsman for the local office on aging in Salisbury; she suggested that I call the Maryland state agency in charge of licensing and regulation of nursing homes and file a complaint. I called the agency, left a voice mail message and received a call from a representative the same day. She took note of my complaint and told me that someone would respond and pull records. On August 18, I received a call from an on-site investigator, who was directing a team of investigators. He informed me that they were on the job and he elicited additional concerns that had arisen since my initial complaint. I reported the failure to provide a working jerry chair, the difficulty in contacting staff physicians to understand the extent of my father's condition, and the need for me to monitor my father's pain management protocol during his last days. The investigator indicated that the team had found significant problems and that he would call me when the report was completed. The investigator called me ten days later and informed me that the investigation revealed additional problems with my father's pain management and gave me a number to call to receive a written copy of the report.

I understand that the investigation and report resulted in a fine and requirements that the nursing home effect specific improvements during a specified time.

Quite frankly, I was surprised and pleased that anything came from my telephone call, let alone a thorough investigation with the clear hope that future residents of Genesis Elder Care receive better treatment. I learned from an official in the state office regulating nursing homes that my specific complaint was integral to the investigation, pointing out problems that a standard audit would not have revealed. It is important to me and to any one who has a family member in the care of a nursing home to know that there is recourse and that we can contribute to improvements in the system.

Thank you.